

# **A TRAVELER AT FORTY**

BY  
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## CHAPTER I

### BARFLEUR TAKES ME IN HAND

I HAVE just turned forty. I have seen a little something of life. I have been a newspaper man, editor, magazine contributor, author and, before these things, several odd kinds of clerk before I found out what I could do.

Eleven years ago I wrote my first novel, which was issued by a New York publisher and suppressed by him, Heaven knows why. For, the same year they suppressed my book because of its alleged immoral tendencies, they published Zola's "Fecundity" and "An Englishwoman's Love Letters." I fancy now, after eleven years of wonder, that it was not so much the supposed immorality, as the book's straightforward, plain-spoken discussion of American life in general. We were not used then in America to calling a spade a spade, particularly in books. We had great admiration for Tolstoi and Flaubert and Balzac and de Maupassant at a distance—some of us—and it was quite an honor to have handsome sets of these men on our shelves, but mostly we had been schooled in the literature of Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, Charles Lamb and that refined company of English sentimental realists who told us something about life, but not everything. No doubt all of these great men knew how shabby a thing this world is—how full of lies, make-believe, seeming and false pretense it all is, but they had agreed among themselves, or with the public, or with sentiment generally, not to talk about that too much. Books were always to be built out of facts concerning "our better natures." We were always

to be seen as we wish to be seen. There were villains to be sure—liars, dogs, thieves, scoundrels—but they were strange creatures, hiding away in dark, unconventional places and scarcely seen save at night and peradventure; whereas we, all clean, bright, honest, well-meaning people, were living in nice homes, going our way honestly and truthfully, going to church, raising our children believing in a Father, a Son and a Holy Ghost, and never doing anything wrong at any time save as these miserable liars, dogs, thieves, et cetera, might suddenly appear and make us. Our books largely showed us as heroes. If anything happened to our daughters it was not their fault but the fault of these miserable villains. Most of us were without original sin. The business of our books, our church, our laws, our jails, was to keep us so.

I am quite sure that it never occurred to many of us that there was something really improving in a plain, straightforward understanding of life. For myself, I accept now no creeds. I do not know what truth is, what beauty is, what love is, what hope is. I do not believe any one absolutely and I do not doubt any one absolutely. I think people are both evil and well-intentioned.

While I was opening my mail one morning I encountered a now memorable note which was addressed to me at my apartment. It was from an old literary friend of mine in England who expressed himself as anxious to see me immediately. I have always liked him. I like him because he strikes me as amusingly English, decidedly literary and artistic in his point of view, a man with a wide wisdom, discriminating taste, rare selection. He wears a monocle in his right eye, à la Chamberlain, and I like him for that. I like people who take themselves with a grand air, whether they like me or not—particularly if the grand air is backed up by a real personality. In this case it is.

Next morning Barfleur took breakfast with me; it was a most interesting affair. He was late—very. He stalked in, his spats shining, his monocle glowing with a shrewd, inquisitive eye behind it, his whole manner genial, self-sufficient, almost dictatorial and always final. He takes charge so easily, rules so sufficiently, does so essentially well in all circumstances where he is interested so to do.

“I have decided,” he observed with that managerial air which always delights me because my soul is not in the least managerial, “that you will come back to England with me. I have my passage arranged for the twenty-second. You will come to my house in England; you will stay there a few days; then I shall take you to London and put you up at a very good hotel. You will stay there until January first and then we shall go to the south of France—Nice, the Riviera, Monte Carlo; from there you will go to Rome, to Paris, where I shall join you,—and then sometime in the spring or summer, when you have all your notes, you will return to London or New York and write your impressions and I will see that they are published!”

“If it can be arranged,” I interpolated.

“It *can* be arranged,” he replied emphatically. “I will attend to the financial part and arrange affairs with both an American and an English publisher.”

Sometimes life is very generous. It walks in and says, “Here! I want you to do a certain thing,” and it proceeds to arrange all your affairs for you. I felt curiously at this time as though I was on the edge of a great change. When one turns forty and faces one’s first

transatlantic voyage, it is a more portentous event than when it comes at twenty.

\* \* \* \* \*

I shall not soon forget reading in a morning paper on the early ride downtown the day we sailed, of the suicide of a friend of mine, a brilliant man. He had fallen on hard lines; his wife had decided to desert him; he was badly in debt. I knew him well. I had known his erratic history. Here on this morning when I was sailing for Europe, quite in the flush of a momentary literary victory, he was lying in death. It gave me pause. It brought to my mind the Latin phrase, "*memento mori*." I saw again, right in the heart of this hour of brightness, how grim life really is. Fate is kind, or it is not. It puts you ahead, or it does not. If it does not, nothing can save you. I acknowledge the Furies. I believe in them. I have heard the disastrous beating of their wings.

When I reached the ship, it was already a perfect morning in full glow. The sun was up; a host of gulls were on the wing; an air of delicious adventure enveloped the great liner's dock at the foot of Thirteenth Street.

Did ever a boy thrill over a ship as I over this monster of the seas?

In the first place, even at this early hour it was crowded with people. From the moment I came on board I was delighted by the eager, restless movement of the throng. The main deck was like the lobby of one of the great New York hotels at dinner-time. There was much calling on the part of a company of dragooned ship-stewards to "keep moving, please," and the enthusiasm of farewells and inquiries after this person and that, were delightful to hear. I stopped awhile in the writing-room and wrote some notes. I



went to my stateroom and found there several telegrams and letters of farewell. Later still, some books which had been delivered at the ship, were brought to me. I went back to the dock and mailed my letters, encountered Barfleur finally and exchanged greetings, and then perforce soon found myself taken in tow by him, for he wanted, obviously, to instruct me in all the details of this new world upon which I was now entering.

At eight-thirty came the call to go ashore. At eight fifty-five I had my first glimpse of a Miss E., as discreet and charming a bit of English femininity as one would care to set eyes upon. She was an English actress of some eminence whom Barfleur was fortunate enough to know. Shortly afterward a Miss X. was introduced to him and to Miss E., by a third acquaintance of Miss E.'s, Mr. G.—a very direct, self-satisfied and aggressive type of Jew. I noticed him strolling about the deck some time before I saw him conversing with Miss E., and later, for a moment, with Barfleur. I saw these women only for a moment at first, but they impressed me at once as rather attractive examples of the prosperous stage world.

It was nine o'clock—the hour of the ship's sailing. I went forward to the prow, and watched the sailors on B deck below me cleaning up the final details of loading, bolting down the freight hatches covering the windlass and the like. All the morning I had been particularly impressed with the cloud of gulls fluttering about the ship, but now the harbor, the magnificent wall of lower New York, set like a jewel in a green ring of sea water, took my eye. When should I see it again? How soon should I be back? I had undertaken this voyage in pell-mell haste. I had not figured at all on where I was going or what I was going to do. London—yes, to gather the data for the last third of a novel; Rome—assuredly,

because of all things I wished to see Rome; the Riviera, say, and Monte Carlo, because the south of France has always appealed to me; Paris, Berlin—possibly; Holland—surely.

I stood there till the *Mauretania* fronted her prow outward to the broad Atlantic. Then I went below and began unpacking, but was not there long before I was called out by Barfleur.

“Come up with me,” he said.

We went to the boat deck where the towering red smoke-stacks were belching forth trailing clouds of smoke. I am quite sure that Barfleur, when he originally made his authoritative command that I come to England with him, was in no way satisfied that I would. It was a somewhat light venture on his part, but here I was. And now, having “let himself in” for this, as he would have phrased it, I could see that he was intensely interested in what Europe would do to me—and possibly in what I would do to Europe. We walked up and down as the boat made her way majestically down the harbor. We parted presently but shortly he returned to say, “Come and meet Miss E. and Miss X. Miss E. is reading your last novel. She likes it.”



“I saw Mr. G. conversing with Miss E.”

I went down, interested to meet these two, for the actress—the talented, good-looking representative of that peculiarly feminine world of art—appeals to me very much. I have always thought, since I have been able to reason about it, that the stage is almost the only ideal outlet for the artistic temperament of a talented and beautiful women. Men?—well, I don’t care so much for the men of the stage. I acknowledge the distinction of such a temperament as that of David Garrick or Edwin Booth. These were great actors and, by the same token, they were great artists—wonderful artists. But

in the main the men of the stage are frail shadows of a much more real thing—the active, constructive man in other lines.

On the contrary, the women of the stage are somehow, by right of mere womanhood, the art of looks, form, temperament, mobility, peculiarly suited to this realm of show, color and make-believe. The stage is fairyland and they are of it. Women—the women of ambition, aspiration, artistic longings—act, anyhow, all the time. They lie like anything. They never show their true colors—or very rarely. If you want to know the truth, you must see through their pretty, petty artistry, back to the actual conditions behind them, which are conditioning and driving them. Very few, if any, have a real grasp on what I call life. They have no understanding of and no love for philosophy. They do not care for the subtleties of chemistry and physics. Knowledge—book knowledge, the sciences—well, let the men have that. Your average woman cares most—almost entirely—for the policies and the abstrusities of her own little world. Is her life going right? Is she getting along? Is her skin smooth? Is her face still pretty? Are there any wrinkles? Are there any gray hairs in sight? What can she do to win one man? How can she make herself impressive to all men? Are her feet small? Are her hands pretty? Which are the really nice places in the world to visit? Do men like this trait in women? or that? What is the latest thing in dress, in jewelry, in hats, in shoes? How can she keep herself spick and span? These are all leading questions with her—strong, deep, vital, painful. Let the men have knowledge, strength, fame, force—that is their business. The real man, her man, should have some one of these things if she is really going to love him very much. I am talking about the semi-artistic woman with ambition. As for her, she clings to these poetical details and they make her life. Poor little frail things—fighting with every weapon

at their command to buy and maintain the courtesy of the world. Truly, I pity women. I pity the strongest, most ambitious woman I ever saw. And, by the same token, I pity the poor helpless, hopeless drab and drudge without an idea above a potato, who never had and never will have a look in on anything. I know—and there is not a beating feminine heart anywhere that will contradict me—that they are all struggling to buy this superior masculine strength against which they can lean, to which they can fly in the hour of terror. It is no answer to my statement, no contradiction of it, to say that the strongest men crave the sympathy of the tenderest women. These are complementary facts and my statement is true. I am dealing with women now, not men. When I come to men I will tell you all about them!

Our modern stage world gives the ideal outlet for all that is most worth while in the youth and art of the female sex. It matters not that it is notably unmoral. You cannot predicate that of any individual case until afterward. At any rate, to me, and so far as women are concerned, it is distinguished, brilliant, appropriate, important. I am always interested in a well recommended woman of the stage.

What did we talk about—Miss E. and I? The stage a little, some newspapermen and dramatic critics that we had casually known, her interest in books and the fact that she had posed frequently for those interesting advertisements which display a beautiful young woman showing her teeth or holding aloft a cake of soap or a facial cream. She had done some of this work in the past—and had been well paid for it because she was beautiful, and she showed me one of her pictures in a current magazine advertising a set of furs.

I found that Barfleur, my very able patron, was doing everything that should be done to make the trip comfortable without show or fuss. Many have this executive or managerial gift. Sometimes I think it is a natural trait of the English—of their superior classes, anyhow. They go about colonizing so efficiently, industriously. They make fine governors and patrons. I have always been told that English direction and English directors are thorough. Is this true or is it not? At this writing, I do not know.

Not only were all our chairs on deck here in a row, but our chairs at table had already been arranged for—four seats at the captain's table. It seems that from previous voyages on this ship Barfleur knew the captain. He also knew the chairman of the company in England. No doubt he knew the chief steward. Anyhow, he knew the man who sold us our tickets. He knew the head waiter at the Ritz—he had seen him or been served by him somewhere in Europe. He knew some of the servitors of the Knickerbocker of old. Wherever he went, I found he was always finding somebody whom he knew. I like to get in tow of such a man as Barfleur and see him plow the seas. I like to see what he thinks is important. In this case there happens to be a certain intellectual and spiritual compatibility. He likes some of the things that I like. He sympathizes with my point of view. Hence, so far at least, we have got along admirably. I speak for the present only. I would not answer for my moods or basic change of emotions at any time.

Well, here were the two actresses side by side, both charmingly arrayed, and with them, in a third chair, the short, stout, red-haired Mr. G.

I covertly observed the personality of Miss X. Here was some one who, on sight, at a glance, attracted me far more significantly than

ever Miss E. could. I cannot tell you why, exactly. In a way, Miss E. appeared, at moments and from certain points of view—delicacy, refinement, sweetness of mood—the more attractive of the two. But Miss X., with her chic face, her dainty little chin, her narrow, lavender-lidded eyes, drew me quite like a magnet. I liked a certain snap and vigor which shot from her eyes and which I could feel represented our raw American force. A foreigner will not, I am afraid, understand exactly what I mean; but there is something about the American climate, its soil, rain, winds, race spirit, which produces a raw, direct incisiveness of soul in its children. They are strong, erect, elated, enthusiastic. They look you in the eye, cut you with a glance, say what they mean in ten thousand ways without really saying anything at all. They come upon you fresh like cold water and they have the luster of a hard, bright jewel and the fragrance of a rich, red, full-blown rose. Americans are wonderful to me—American men and American women. They are rarely polished or refined. They know little of the subtleties of life—its order and procedures. But, oh, the glory of their spirit, the hope of them, the dreams of them, the desires and enthusiasm of them. That is what wins me. They give me the sense of being intensely, enthusiastically, humanly alive.

Miss X. did not tell me anything about herself, save that she was on the stage in some capacity and that she knew a large number of newspaper men, critics, actors, et cetera. A chorus girl, I thought; and then, by the same token, a lady of extreme unconventionality.

I think the average man, however much he may lie and pretend, takes considerable interest in such women. At the same time there are large orders and schools of mind, bound by certain variations of temperament, and schools of thought, which either flee temptation of this kind, find no temptation in it, or, when

confronted, resist it vigorously. The accepted theory of marriage and monogamy holds many people absolutely. There are these who would never sin—hold unsanctioned relations, I mean—with any woman. There are others who will always be true to one woman. There are those who are fortunate if they ever win a single woman. We did not talk of these things but it was early apparent that she was as wise as the serpent in her knowledge of men and in the practice of all the little allurements of her sex.

Barfleur never ceased instructing me in the intricacies of ship life. I never saw so comforting and efficient a man.

“Oh”—who can indicate exactly the sound of the English “Oh”—“Oh, *there* you are.” (His *are* always sounded like *ah*.) “Now let me tell you something. You are to dress for dinner. Ship etiquette requires it. You are to talk to the captain some—tell him how much you think of his ship, and so forth; and you are not to neglect the neighbor to your right at table. Ship etiquette, I believe, demands that you talk to your neighbor, at least at the captain’s table—that is the rule, I think. You are to take in Miss X. I am to take in Miss E.” Was it any wonder that my sea life was well-ordered and that my lines fell in pleasant places?

After dinner we adjourned to the ship’s drawing-room and there Miss X. fell to playing cards with Barfleur at first, afterwards with Mr. G., who came up and found us, thrusting his company upon us perforce. The man amused me, so typically aggressive, money-centered was he. However, not he so much as Miss X. and her mental and social attitude, commanded my attention. Her card playing and her boastful accounts of adventures at Ostend, Trouville, Nice, Monte Carlo and Aix-les-Bains indicated plainly the trend of her interests. She was all for the showy life that was to



be found in these places—burning with a desire to glitter—not shine—in that half world of which she was a smart atom. Her conversation was at once showy, naïve, sophisticated and yet unschooled. I could see by Barfleur's attentions to her, that aside from her crude Americanisms which ordinarily would have alienated him, he was interested in her beauty, her taste in dress, her love of a certain continental café life which encompassed a portion of his own interests. Both were looking forward to a fresh season of it—Barfleur with me—Miss X. with some one who was waiting for her in London.

I think I have indicated in one or two places in the preceding pages that Barfleur, being an Englishman of the artistic and intellectual classes, with considerable tradition behind him and all the feeling of the worth-whileness of social order that goes with class training, has a high respect for the conventions—or rather let me say appearances, for, though essentially democratic in spirit and loving America—its raw force—he still clings almost pathetically, I think, to that vast established order, which is England. It may be producing a dying condition of race, but still there is something exceedingly fine about it. Now one of the tenets of English social order is that, being a man you must be a gentleman, very courteous to the ladies, very observant of outward forms and appearances, very discreet in your approaches to the wickedness of the world—but nevertheless you may approach and much more, if you are cautious enough.

After dinner there was a concert. It was a dreary affair. When it was over, I started to go to bed but, it being warm and fresh, I stepped outside. The night was beautiful. There were no fellow passengers on the promenade. All had retired. The sky was magnificent for stars—Orion, the Pleiades, the Milky Way, the Big

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